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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 4-TEXT)

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TAGS: TRGY KNNP KS

SUBJECT: SEOUL EXAMINING ADHERENCE TO GLOBAL NUCLEAR ENERGY PARTNERSHIP (GNEP)

REF: STATE 121724

Classified By: EMIN ANDREW J. QUINN, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) Despite numerous professions of interest in the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) since its launch in 2006, South Korea surprised U.S. observers by deciding only a few days before the GNEP Ministerial in Vienna on September 16 not to sign the GNEP Statement of Principles. An official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) said that a decision to sign the Statement of Principles, expected to be blessed in a meeting of the Korean National Security Council (NSC), was derailed at the last minute by objections from one or more (unidentified) NSC members. The Director General for Atomic Energy Cooperation at the Ministry of Science and Technology said on October 15 that the issue will come up again in interministerial meetings this week. It remains unclear which part of the government has raised questions about the Statement of Principles and how strongly-held the objections are. End summary.

U.S. EFFORTS TO ASSUAGE KOREAN CONCERN ON GNEP SINCE 2006

¶12. (C) The launch of the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership by President Bush in 2006, and its implicit division of the world into suppliers and consumers of nuclear fuel, created anxiety in the nuclear energy community of South Korea. Although as a matter of policy, Korea has forsaken uranium enrichment and reprocessing of plutonium, it is a country with a significant program of nuclear research, including (in cooperation with the U.S.) in an advanced fuel-cycle technology called pyroprocessing. Through numerous meetings with South Korean officials, the U.S. has attempted to clarify that the GNEP Statement of Principles does not require giving up any sovereign rights and would not prevent Korea from continuing its cooperation with the U.S. on pyroprocessing and other advanced technologies. South Korean officials, in turn, have increasingly referred to GNEP in positive terms. It therefore came as a surprise and a disappointment that South Korea did not join the 16 nations that signed the GNEP Statement of Principles during the GNEP Ministerial hosted by Secretary Bodman in Vienna on September ¶16.

MOFAT CHAGRINED WITH FAILURE TO SIGN

¶13. (C) ESTH Chief spoke on September 18 to Park Chul-min,

Director of the Office of Disarmament and Nonproliferation at MOFAT to inquire about Korea's failure to sign. Park (please protect) said that MOFAT too had been taken by surprise. He indicated that he personally favored signing and that he had worked very hard to get a Korean decision to sign. An interministerial meeting at the Deputy Minister level, attended by MOFAT Deputy Minister for Policy Planning and International Organizations Park In-kook, had approved the recommendation to sign. The Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), in charge of nuclear research and nuclear fuel production, was also fully on board. The decision was to have been blessed during a meeting of the Korean NSC a few days before the Vienna Ministerial. Foreign Minister Song Min-soon was fully briefed on the issue and strongly supported signing. (The MOST Deputy Prime Minister, not a member of the NSC, was not there. He would probably have been invited to the NSC meeting if the issue had been seen as controversial.) Unexpectedly, one or more unidentified members of the NSC raised an objection, and the decision to sign was not approved. Korea attended the Ministerial as an observer. Park made clear that this outcome was embarrassing to MOFAT.

¶4. (C) Asked about the nature of the objections, Park commented broadly that GNEP and similar proposals that seem to limit technology sovereignty face many concerns on the part of non-aligned countries (he mentioned especially Brazil and Argentina), as well as technologically advanced non-nuclear countries such as Canada, the Netherlands and Germany. He speculated about efforts to create criteria, e.g. regarding the size of the domestic nuclear power program, that would allow certain additional countries to enrich or reprocess. Park asserted that Korea has no intention of backing away from its political commitments in the 1992 joint declaration with North Korea, but he suggested obliquely that some may feel that in some distant future (i.e. after reunification) such commitments may no longer be necessary. It was not clear whether Park was describing the concerns of

those who raised objections to GNEP signing, or was himself speculating about their possible thinking. ESTH Chief pointed out that any effort to carve out exceptions allowing for enrichment or reprocessing would carry proliferation risks, and the safest position is to limit the spread of sensitive technologies to countries already possessing them. Park appeared to agree personally.

¶5. (C) Park remarked that it would be helpful to MOFAT's efforts to secure a decision to sign the Declaration of Principles to have more high-level U.S. approaches to key Korean players. ESTH Chief pointed out that Secretary Bodman had personally raised GNEP with the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Energy (MOCIE) last December, but Park said that MOCIE is not influential on this subject.

MOST DG OPTIMISTIC, DIRECTOR LESS SO

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¶6. (C) ESTH Chief and visiting ISN/NESS Deputy Director Alex Burkart called October 15 on Kim Young-sik, Director General for Atomic Energy at MOST. DG Kim said that he personally was pleased at the progress made in solidifying GNEP at the September 16 Ministerial, but noted that Korea remained an observer. He observed that he had recently spoken by phone with Edward McGinnis of DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy, who had expressed hope that Korea would sign the Statement of Principles before the GNEP Steering Committee meeting scheduled for December 11-13. Alluding to difficulties in the Korean policymaking process, Kim commented that MOST and MOFAT well understand the advantages of joining GNEP, but that "some ministries" still have an inadequate understanding. He said that MOST and MOFAT were attempting to resolve the issue. He noted that interministerial meetings scheduled for the week of October 15 will again address GNEP, and predicted that Korea would be ready to sign "very soon."

¶7. (C) Burkart pointed out that the meeting of the

Generation IV Nuclear Forum (GenIV), scheduled for November 28-29 in Gyeongju, could be an appropriate opportunity for Korea to adhere to the Statement of Principles. Kim commented that, if a decision to sign is made in time, he would like to invite an official such as DOE Assistant Secretary Spurgeon to visit Korea for the GenIV meeting.

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¶8. (C) In later comments out of Director General Kim's earshot, the MOST Director for Atomic Energy Cooperation, Hur Jae-yong, cast doubt on Kim's comments that the interministerial issue would be resolved "very soon." "It is harder than he indicates," Hur whispered.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) MOST and MOFAT are clearly on board with signing the Statement of Principles. It remains unclear what part of the government still needs to be convinced, and how strongly-held the contrary views are. We will follow up after the interministerial meetings scheduled for this week. End comment.

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